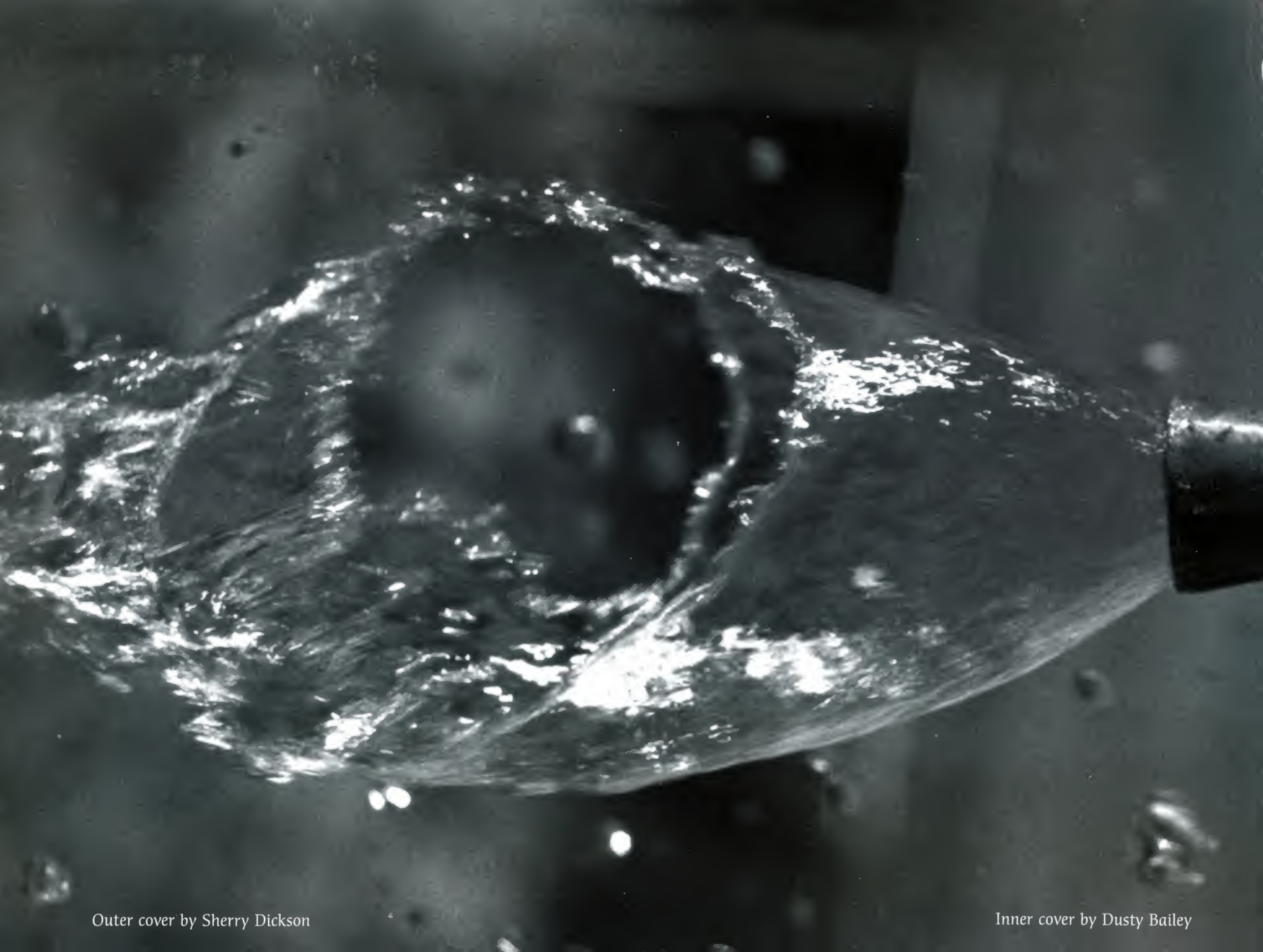


A woman with dark hair, wearing a black off-the-shoulder dress and a black choker, stands in the foreground on the left, looking back over her right shoulder. In the background, a train with several white and grey freight cars is on tracks at night. The scene is lit with a mix of warm yellow light from the train and cool blue/purple light from the foreground. The word "Forces" is written in a large, stylized, 3D font in the upper right.

# Forces

2003



Outer cover by Sherry Dickson

Inner cover by Dusty Bailey



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## No Cuts

Beth Turner Ayers

You remember her  
Sideling up beside you  
Moving slightly forward  
Cutting in line  
Always, every time  
In front of someone  
She's "all grown up" now  
Making maneuvers  
In her mobile mini mansion  
With no peripheral vision  
Ignoring all rules  
Rules of etiquette  
Rules of safe deliverance  
Gliding up beside you  
Her two ton projectile  
Moving slightly forward  
Cutting in line  
With phone in hand  
She pauses for a moment  
To bark some order  
To her departing child  
The girl who ignores her  
And hurries forward  
To cut in line



Sherry Dickson

## **Racism's a Quiet Storm**

Sydney Portilla-Diggs

Mama doesn't like  
To go downtown  
On Saturdays.  
She says it's cloudy  
With black folks and  
I was thinking  
With all the racism there is,  
We don't need to be so  
Prejudice against ourselves.  
Sometimes we are the most  
Prejudice  
When we deal with our own.



## **A Dog's Eye View of the Bicycle**

Merriman Zajac

On the porch of a dirty mobile home  
Reeking of lazy languish  
A dirty, drowsy dog sleeps, with rust in his bones, and  
soggy teeth  
He dreams grand dreams:

He remembers the days of his ancestors  
The good old days  
When the honorable wild dogs chased prehistoric chickens  
Massive, feathered fowl  
Fled the brilliant snapping teeth  
Teeth that were sharpened and straightened by the hard life  
By natural selection  
Chasing four-hundred pound chickens is a risky occupation  
Those dogs who were perhaps weaker, whose teeth were  
inferior  
Surely fell in some heroic battle  
But the life is one full of excitement, glamour, and the  
sense of grandeur

They were the days when the dog was king  
Such wonderful days  
Days to be yearned for

A quiet whirring noise stirs the dog from his sleepy  
contemplations  
A bicycle is approaching  
Its rider, innocent and oblivious  
Just like the chickens of old  
The rider is enjoying the fresh air, the beautiful countryside  
His only defense is potential speed  
Which is the very thing that provides the challenge  
The worthless dog needs no further persuasion  
To re-awaken those ancient days of adventure  
As he pursues the terrified bicyclist,  
He imagines himself running with the best of his ancestors  
He can feel the camaraderie of the hunt  
And taste the glorious flesh  
Of prehistoric chicken



Diane Wood

## Coffee Grounds

Mary Rehlin

The dark man came in again  
And robbed me of this week's wages.  
Now I spit, and curse, and fight,  
But my courage only comes in stages.  
The dim light blinds my eyes from truth;  
She says that circumstances suit-  
You make the bed in which you lie;  
But the vines I harvest bear no fruit  
Tangled up and torn apart  
With no time allowed to heal;  
Starving inside and starving to death,  
Sometimes it saves to steal.  
I sip my coffee and clear my mind  
As I watch the steam dance in the night;  
Content that for only a dollar or two  
I can sit in this haven and forget the fight.  
Into the stars my gaze is lost-  
Into the heavens my soul I impart;  
Thankful these trials will someday adjourn-  
But the taste left in my mouth is tart.

## Temporary Sounds

Tracy Carroll

I've no idea what streams are collecting while  
I listen to this again and again,  
Thinking only of one thing,  
One thing broken

And scattered where you can't see it.  
The human inhale is painful:  
It waits for your up-glance.

And I wonder how silly it all is to

Think about you in this way.  
What clouds are turning, there  
Over your silver slip of a moon? I  
Know the water is streaming back to  
Where it breaks upon  
Your ocean,  
There where stars were flung upon velvet.



## The Rainbow of Childhood

Brittany Huston

Cool, sticky, and sweet.  
Creates content mustaches.  
Drinking joyfulness.

Fuzzy, comforting.  
My childhood best friend's round nose.  
Warmth and happiness.

The light shining down.  
Painting color on springtime.  
Streams of radiance.

New growth coming in.  
Reminder of season's change.  
Cool, free, and easy.

Soothing, refreshing.  
Float in the cool of summer.  
Totally happy.

Smooth and inviting.  
Smile of a curious cat.  
Velvety goodness.

Sherry Dickson



## **The Seasons**

Betty Jane Brodie

[Seniors Active in Learning]

Do you remember the seasons of your youth? The first snow flakes falling, excitement all around, getting out the little sleds for rides, the bitter cold and the wood burning stoves, little cold feet and warmed brick in your bed. Then a Jonquil appears, yellow and majestic, a bird starts to sing and tiny green blades of grass appear. It is spring and the world is new. Soon school will be out and we will be free to run and jump and play, and we sing the school songs as the school year ends.

“Oh, we sing now to our school,  
and we make the song loud and clear,  
with our hats off and our heads bowed  
to the school we love, so dear.”

Then heat begins, but we don't notice this much. Heat is more for old folks. We nap in the afternoon, while the buzz fans are running. We get to play with the water hose, squirting everyone and everything and go to Bush's swimming pool every chance, or to Loy Lake. Summer wears on and September comes. We watch the new shoes and size larger clothes return to school again, and the wonderful smell of chalk and crayons, and the unforgettable smells of the season that stay with us forever.

## The Pilot

Brian J. Mackert

[Reflections on the Columbia Space Shuttle Tragedy]

Pilot . . . your craft, your steed.  
Like knights of old readied for battle.  
Your heart racing at the power beneath you.  
Swelling with pride at the oneness you have created  
The man and his mount.  
But Pilot . . . your steed has stumbled.  
He plunges headlong toward death.  
And you, dear Pilot, are taken down with him.  
Unable to separate from the oneness you created.  
The oneness that once thrilled you is now your doom.  
The man . . . the machine . . . and the sonic boom.  
Pilot, you will be remembered.  
We won't forget the adventure your heart dared.  
You touched the stars and raced across the heavens.  
From heaven's height, your doom visible to the whole world.  
It scarred the heavens and shook our being.

Gabrielle Pruitt





## Voices from Vegas

Gabriel Cook  
Michael Harms  
Coleman Morefield

From: Gabriel Michael Coleman  
To: William G. Gannon  
Sent: Wednesday,  
December 04, 2002  
11:30 AM

Subject: Vegas Negotiations

Mr. Gannon:

I am happy to report that our negotiations with Towers, Inc. here in Las Vegas are going well. Towers has agreed to construct our new Phoenix office building for \$160 million, less than we were expecting. We shall complete the details during the next three days. The daily sessions have been long and grueling, but we are pleased with the progress. We can give a full report when we return.

From: Gabriel Michael  
Colman<CrackerJACKMan@hotmail.com>  
To: Fireandice  
Sent: Wednesday,  
December 04, 2002  
11:40 AM

Subject: Wassup

Hey Bro,

Las vegas is great. The business negotiations suck, but the strippers and gambling are keeping me going. We gotta come down here sometime if you can get away from that succubus girlfriend of yours. Three more days in heaven, then im back to boring texas. Talk to you later.

Take care Dude,  
Cole

From: Gabriel Michael  
Coleman<CrackerJACKMan@hotmail.com>  
To: Cutensnuggly  
Sent: Wednesday,  
December 04, 2002  
11:50 AM

Subject: Hi Snuggles!!!

Dearest Snuggle Bug,

I am so lonely without you, Baby. Still three more days before I get back to Texas. Some guys seem to get off on this gambling stuff, but it just isn't for me. The business negotiations are boring, but if I want to keep my job, I have to stay. I love you very much, Baby.

I miss you, Snuggle Bug,  
Pookie Bear

## **Small Truth**

Molly Boyce

White lies,  
An innuendo undone,  
Spreading with rumor  
As fat caterpillars  
Feed on bark and sprouts  
Hungering for life  
While eating their way  
Into idle darkness  
Cocooned by deceitful webs  
Transforming a small truth  
Into a moth drawn to a flame.



Stacy Adams



## An Equation

Tracy Carroll

Why do you leave it running, not so much  
To leave and remove you from matter,  
But to shield the edges from fraying?  
You always come and yet you are never there,  
Always dropping a crumb of yourself in front of  
Hungry eyes.

But some learn only to stare.  
For touching doesn't end this hunger,  
It merely comprehends the lack of edibility.  
You are running in a sandtrap,  
Letting the dust settle and then fly back  
Up to where your grasp it,  
Mid-air.

Stacy Adams



## Assimilation

Sandra Aravena

"I don't know the  
meaning of that,"  
He murmured  
While I was talking in  
class.

Learning a foreign  
language  
Is the start,  
Living in another  
country  
Listening to the news  
And still not able to  
understand

Going through the  
scholarly system  
And getting a push  
back  
Not to be placed in  
English One  
But in a remedial  
course  
Is their solution for  
that.

If your ideas are  
different  
Then the hosted one  
You better be careful  
Or someone will ask  
you  
To step out

After many years of  
learning  
When you are finally  
Engaged in Lyotard's  
language games  
A big surprise  
Hiding  
The whole time  
The unspoken rules  
Still  
Set beside.



Dusty Bailey

## Monologue

Richard Scott

“To be or not to be. That is the question.” (Pause) Hold it please. This is not working. Could you turn up the work light please? I’m sorry to be wasting your time like this. I appreciate the offer to audition, but I don’t think this is going to work out. It’s not you; it’s not the play; it’s not the part; it’s not the fact that it is community theatre. I love the theatre, and have played any part, anywhere. The only way I can tell my age is by counting the grease pencil stubs in my makeup case. I have been doing theatre since I was six years old when I became the lead in our class play. The entire play was rewritten to make my part bigger. I was hooked. I played every part you could imagine throughout school. When school ended, I became bigger and more important. Auditioning became a thing of the past. Then, I got to the point where they were writing the parts just for me. Do you know what it is like to have 1,200 people hanging on your every word? It is fan-friggin’-tastic. And let’s not forget the life that goes along with that. Wow. Waking up at two in the afternoon for the evening show. Staying thin because the most nutritious thing in your diet is the wedge of lime in your rum & coke. But it is hard to keep that life going. Sooner or later, the weight doesn’t stay off by itself. The wrinkles are harder to cover up. And there is always someone younger, better looking, and yes, more talented, ready to take your spot. You go from lead, to brother, to uncle, to father, to interesting walk on. You finally realize that what is, was, and what was, is nevermore. So, don’t get me wrong, theatre’s fine if that’s where you choose to be. Right now, I choose not “to be.”

## To The Morning

Dallie Clark

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Psalm 30:5

Morning light  
Is a foreign, unreachable place  
In this night that lingers  
Long and parlor quiet.

In night's charcoal caress,  
The bruised soul left behind  
Timidly settles  
Into unknown rooms.

Yet morning's weightless  
Light is strongly sheer  
And satisfying against the heavy  
Drape of night.

Morning may duel gently,  
But its tepid rhythm rules  
Over midnight's icy hold,  
Over its hapless, uninvited grief.

Believe, then, my aching friend,  
That morning's tide  
Persists - and the rising  
Of its golden head

Among the angels promises rescue.







Sherry Dickson

## **The Pub**

Mary Rehlin

Take a good look around  
At the empty chairs and empty glasses,  
The gloomy faces and lifeless masses  
That utter not a sound.  
As if made of stone  
They stay here in all types of weather.  
Each day they congregate together  
And they all drink alone.



## **Bus Stop**

Claire Shipman

He says he doesn't believe  
People are born with souls  
Anymore. I'm inclined to  
Agree.

Two gulls circle soaring  
Over and around and  
Over and around.  
They're waiting for the dumpster banquet.  
Just killing time.  
Just like you and me

It's a dollar one way and for  
Two you get a day pass. You  
Know it's just an endless loop  
De loop.  
Pick-up trucks roar  
By and bye and  
By and bye.  
I've got a way of tuning them out.  
Don't worry about it.  
Don't, whatever you do.



## From Beginning to End

Molly Boyce

You tell yourself you write  
For the enjoyment of seeing  
Insignificant words strung  
Together in short, neat rows  
Playing on a playground  
Of thoughts and sounds  
Stretched across taunt lines  
On clean, white paper,

But in the end you write  
Because the word phrases  
Wake you from your sleep,  
Exploding through your mind  
With such lightening speed  
That you can't contain them  
Unless you have pen in hand  
And your soul on your sleeve.



Gabrielle Pruitt



Wendy Gollihue

## On Dying While Commuting to the Office

Cameron Sells

I died today on the way to work.  
My future life suspended as it exited the off-ramp.

I tried to swerve the car and end  
The pale charade but my rebellious corpse refused  
To heed my voiceless cries.

I punched the clock, empty fingers animated  
By the twisted black necromantic powers sustaining me.

Once more I tried, attempting  
To heave my garrulous bulk, this earth-bound prison out  
The forty-second story window.

No luck.

I see my body wither and fade  
Over lunchtime's rotting flesh and compost.  
By quitting time my scabrous, zombified remains fumble

With the time-clock.

The errant meat puppet drops unceremoniously back into the car.

Crawling back into the grave  
Resurrection waiting for the alarm clock's summons.

## Schibboleth

Translation by Sandra Aravena

Mitsamt meinen Steinen,  
den grossgeweinten  
hinter den Gittern,

schleiften sie mich  
in die Mitte des Marktes,  
dorthin,  
wo die Fahne sich aufrollt, der ich  
keinerlei Eid schwor.

Flote,  
Doppelflote der Nacht:  
denke der dunklen  
Zwillingsrote  
in Wien und Madrid.

Setz deine Fahne auf Halbmas,  
Erinnerung.  
Auf Halbmas  
für heute und immer.

Herz:  
gib dich auch hier zu erkennen,  
hier, in der Mitte des Marktes.  
Ruf's, das Schibboleth, hinaus  
in die Fremde der Heimat:  
Februar. No pasaran.

Einhorn:  
du weisst um die Steine,  
du weisst um die Wasser,  
komm,  
ich fuhr dich hinweg  
zu den Stimmen



Diane Wood



# Insomnia

J. A Goodrich

Suicide

Genocide

The Crucifixion

My spherical heresy rips your soul

With the roundness of the bullet

In the roundness of your head

The roundness of the earth

And the roundness of the dead

The sun

And the moon

Constantly racing

Constantly moving

Constantly pulling

Pulling me

Forcing me out

Out of my head

Out of my life

Out of myself

My insanity and sanity Kaleid

O

Scope

I kant fokus

Kant C

Twis ting and tur ning my H e a d

I must se what yoU se

Tightening

Focusing

Concentrate

Normality

Accomplished

Never

Stop

The

Fight.

## **My Seemingly Perfect World**

Missy Tigges

Keisha's jaded view of my seemingly perfect world was shattered the morning after I stole my mother's mascara. I never saw any harm in borrowing such an insignificant item- I fully intended to return it- but to my mother, it was a careless and selfish act on my part.

Keisha peacefully lay sleeping among my sheets and the scattered contents of her large suitcase. She had been with my family for ten days now; she did not know she was another project of my humanitarian mother. Her mother was physically and mentally ill, the sole root of Keisha's rebellious nature and promiscuity. Keisha had once again been kicked out of her broken home, and left to fend for herself. My mom said she could stay with us, "as long as she gets a job and goes back to school." Keisha was ever so grateful... she wanted to live in a stable, loving home for a while. Oh how she admired the relationship my mom and I had...

That morning the house was silent: nothing but the sound of the warm water running over my bare skin and slapping the tile floor of the shower. My mother burst into the room and jarred me from my lethargic state. No questions asked, no accusations thrown, she immediately began to strike at me; the pain only amplified by my slippery skin. The shower curtain ripped from its rings. I wanted to scream, but my thoughts were on Keisha, sleeping in my bed. My facade would be ruined if she could hear the goings on in the next room. I didn't need to ask why I was being beaten... this was not the first time this had happened. It was just the worst. I attempted to turn my face away from the woman who was hitting me, but she would not allow it. My neck whipped to the right when she slapped me across the face. The woman marched out of the bathroom in a rage. I could feel my heart beating from embarrassment in my stinging, rosy cheek. I never wanted to leave that shower.

Before I opened my bedroom door, I prayed that my sleeping friend had not heard the loud smacks echoing off the tile walls. I couldn't handle it if I could no longer stand on her pedestal. She wanted to be just like me, and I wanted her to want to be just like me. I slowly opened the bedroom door and found my friend sitting on my bed, waiting with a box of makeup. She crossed over to me and grabbed my hand, giving it a warm squeeze. She said not a word, but dragged me back to my bed, and began to apply the concealing foundation to my puffy, swollen cheek.



Gabrielle Pruitt



## Love in Reverse

Tiffany Kellerman

They move in life.  
Separate, but content.

Devilish Cupid arrives on the scene,  
Mischievous in his eye.

He looks. He sees her. He sees him.  
“Love in reverse,” he smirks.  
“History shall be changed!”

His golden arrow takes flight,  
Hits his intended  
And she falls.

Then, his leaden arrow takes flight,  
Hits his other intended  
And he too falls... but in reverse.

She awakens from the wrenching blow with a full heart.  
She looks up, she sees her intended.  
She glows, she smiles, she rises.  
Her chase begins.

He stirs from the attack with a heart full of dread.  
He looks up, he sees his fear.  
He pales, he gasps, he runs.  
His flight begins.

He flies,  
she follows in desperate pursuit of the love she must have.  
He flies,  
knowing her passion will destroy him if she embraces him.  
He flies,  
denying her the chance for her all encompassing love.  
He flies,  
seeking help from above the Gods above.

His hair whipped by the wind, skin glowing with human dew.  
Her legs stretching longer, never tiring from the strides.  
He trips, he stumbles, she reaches out to him.  
He screams, she cries as he dissolves.

## **The Morning**

Liz Cappon

I awaken to our winter wonderland  
I reach to find only a warm pillow  
The mattress suddenly begins to freeze over

Snow is blanketing the once green grass  
Each pure white flake flees from its dreary home

You're gone

Eyes look to run from the hopelessness  
But tears still fall from darkness

The life, the love, and the beauty  
All stolen in one brief morning

## The Man at the Voting Booth

Merriman Zajac

Concerned codger  
Bona-fide party-liner  
Longstanding, upstanding, dependable  
Serving his country with pride  
At the college campus voting booth

He carries his gray head  
With a distinct measure of calm pride  
He is like the old oak tree that his great-grandpa planted  
At the first family homestead  
In America  
The free land  
The man at the booth is a part of his homeland,  
Roots, branch, leaf.

Dusty Bailey



## On the Bench

Yolanda Cooper

there was a gentleman on the  
bench today  
i ain't ever seen him here before  
he must be new  
he looks tired, beat,  
even saddened a lil'

but, he got on a nice shirt  
and a real nice pair of trousers  
but, where's his shoes?

a man ain't got no right being  
without his own shoes

must be a reas'n tho'  
i wonder if they in that raggedy  
bag  
he holds on to  
don't look like it  
looks like old clothes 'n there  
must be his suitcase

he ought to have something he  
can put on his feet

his glasses could use a good  
cleanin' i know that much  
i would offer but he seems not to  
wanna be bothered  
he ain't even 'tempt to say hello  
and he lookin' right at me

but one day he will  
until then, i'll just wait  
looks like he'll be needing  
someone to  
talk to soon enough anyhow

Here

on the bench



Yolanda Cooper



## Structural Damage

Nicole Lynn Jones

There are these thick windows  
And there are these thick blinds  
But there is nothing unbreakable between us;  
I walked past locked doors  
And beyond burned bridges.  
I swallowed endless jagged horizons  
At the concession of another day.  
It is the unfinished, condemned buildings  
That I cannot forgive.  
Time invested in beautiful design  
And tactful growth, soon wasted,  
The body, fallen not because of the peculiar wind,  
But forsaken  
To the shaky logic of a woman gone mad.

Escape me now, reluctant city;  
Shy unto yourself  
And your dimmed reflections  
[These amber lights  
Refuse to illuminate your face any longer.]

Sherry Dickson

## Hide and Go Seek

Craig McKinzie

We usually play on Saturdays,  
but tonight is Monday.  
I'm four years old and I hate to play.  
I want to do anything but play  
our gruesome game.

It's starts the same way it  
always does.  
They stand together in the corner  
and I begin to count  
the blows, my eyes closed.

I can only count to 10,  
So I go to 10 over and over again.  
As I count I silently plead  
It's Monday.  
We only play on Saturday.  
My four year old mind can  
not comprehend  
such a rule to be broken.

I'm on my way to 10 again  
when it stops.  
I keep my eyes closed,  
He may break the rules but  
I never do. I never ever peek.  
That would be cheating.

And away we go.  
As he lets her go she runs.  
No dignity left for those who have to  
hide.  
Out the front door his boots take him.  
This is how the game goes.  
But we're only supposed to play  
on Saturday.

I count to 10 again.  
Now I get to seek.  
I follow her dark grisly trail  
Where can I find her?  
The perfect red hand print on  
my mother's white wall answers  
back to me.

Her face is crushed  
and so is my heart.  
We share a grotesque smile.  
Tonight is Monday and yet we play  
when we only play on Saturday.





## Red Polka Dot Dress

Jacklyn Bennett

hung  
hanging  
wrapped in plastic

it hung

and every time i would open the closet door  
i would see it  
hanging  
bringing out every emotion  
like a whirlwind

and the pictures in my mind  
of her  
wearing it

:the way her chest rose  
:and fell with her every breath  
:it seemed as though  
:i was breathing along with her  
:how her hips were perfectly defined  
:and screamed for the lap of her child

and i would remember  
that she was my touchstone



Sherry Dickson

and i  
was her very being  
replicated  
::replicated::

but she  
she wore that red dress  
the hue that almost matched her lips  
with the brightness  
the enthusiasm like that which would shine  
in her eyes

that red dress  
with the white polka dots  
that looked like holes to my young mind

## Poor Cousin Joan

Karlee Horton

It was at my cousin's funeral when I really realized that my family was crazy. I always knew we were a little different, but it was cousin Joan that revealed to me the true essence of our ways. We met at my grandfather's house before and followed each other to the cemetery. The funeral was going on just fine. As well as it can go when you have a preacher get all the stats on the family and what not five minutes before it starts. He got most of the names wrong, including my cousin Joan who was now Cousin June. Aunt Janine was Aunt Jenny, Uncle Marty was Mary. I mean really he should of just written it down, and known better...who has an Uncle Mary?!? Now my family has always been social drinkers... Ok, ok most of them are alcoholics. My Uncle Marty being the worst. He drinks from the time he gets up to the second he lays down, always with a cup. Well he didn't like being called Mary and decided to do something about it. In the middle of "Amazing Grace" he stands up to inform the congregation, as he called us, that his name was Marty, "damn it!" and we better know it! He keeps ranting on reciting childhood memories and embarrassing stories that I'm sure cousin Joan was happy not to relive. After a couple of minutes in his drunken stupor he began to tell his famous home made jokes. Don't get me wrong; they're funny, just not appropriate. My aunt Janine has always been a little on the religious side. While most of us are still trying to sing along, over my uncle Marty, she starts belting out hallelujahs and praising Jesus for what, I don't know. My grandma Lulu has been a little loco since I've known her, not to mention to worst case of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder that you could ever come across. Well my sister's baby started crying and threw up on grandma Lulu. This only made her throw up. She starts screaming and practically dumping antibacterial gel, lotion, and spray on not only herself, but every person that was unfortunate enough to be near her. My aunt Janine saw it as an evil spirit and starting laying hands and speaking in tongue, while my uncle Marty found it as the most hilarious thing that he had ever seen. He was laughing so hard that he was just about rolling down the aisle. At this point, most of the extended family, personal guests, and friends were leaving, and I don't blame them. My parents were standing there, almost as if nothing was going on. I guess after years and years of these people you get sort of oblivious. I, on the other hand, was dumbfounded. I always knew my family was different, but this, I had no idea! I nudged my brother and we began to laugh. Maybe it wasn't the best way to remember a person, but I'll sure never forget her.



## Spanish Serenade

Shannon Palfreyman

Outside this cottage I hear the  
rhythmic beat of a romantic  
Spanish song,  
And I envision guitars, glittering  
moonlight, and candlelit serenades.  
The small authentic players  
huddle near the love-struck  
lovers holding hands across a  
fajita-clad table, gazing  
passionately through the warm,  
dark night.  
Vineyards surround them, the crackling  
fire warms them, and this melody  
possesses the wine.  
His curls like milk chocolate,  
hers flow smooth down her  
back, their dark skin of exotic  
mixed loves.  
They speak only in eyes, in the beauty  
of song, in her legs brushing  
his underneath  
And they seal their young love, freeze  
this moment in time, and fear  
for life's interruptions  
to come.  
But now the tempo has changed,  
the love song has gone, and now  
all I see is cheap beer.

Mirian Smith



**MM**

Tiffany Kellerman

Faster than a renegade olive!  
More powerful than a lemon-lime garnish!  
Able to pour generous drinks with multiple parts!  
It's a shake.

It's a stir.

It's...

Martini Man!!!

Late into the sugared night, he hears the call: "I'm Blue  
Martini Man!"

He glides over the e

d

g

e of the chilled night

To rescue the Cosmopolitan Lady in distress.

Welcomed into the Dirty Savoy Hotel

"It's all about ratio," claimed the man behind the front  
desk.

Martini Man sours. "Apples are the key."

He lets that remark coat his listeners' ear.

Walking up the Royale staircase, coughing from the dry air,

Movie stars and kings fashioned the walls,

Garnished with a splash of blue.

Martini Man arrives at the diluted room.

There he discovers the Lady

Caught in a Slippery Knob of Chocolate.

"Beware the cocoa powder on the floor," she warns.

He narrowly misses combining shoe leather with the dark  
residue.

"Who did this to you?" he asks

"Cointreau!" she cries.

Martini Man gasps.

"My arch enemy! Why, this is Absolut tops!"

"Please, Martini Man!

I'm watered down and I can't get up!" she exclaimed.

She twists and strains to chill out

Martini Man looks into her pimento eyes and he knows.

He knows exactly what to do.

He gathers up his ice cold rocks.

Serves up a spear.

Catches the Lady and

Waves the top of his open shaker...

And pours.

"Foiled again!" cries the shaken Cointreau.

"You're too top shelf for my plans!"

Martini Man watches as Cointreau seeps into the cocoa  
covered floor.

And smiles.



## *The Insides*

Libby Watts

Another day it's been for sure  
When a listless arm strains to open the door  
Of this ungrateful ride for which I break my back  
Pitiful reason I'll go back for more

I'll head for the t.v. with an unhealthy snack  
Curse at my carpet as I step on a tack  
That taunts me from his place below  
It's just as alive as anything else in this shack

Then off into bed I drag my dead weight  
There's plenty of room since I'm lacking a mate  
Give me someone to care if I live or I die  
Who won't fear lions' hearts or to loose pent-up cries

Unleash him to me- I can smell the insides



## Monologue

Shannon Palfreyman

WOMAN: I keep telling that girl—you don't start thinkin', you gonna end up being nothing but white trash, jus' like your Daddy. Well, let me clarify—ain't no way I'll be taking her sorry slutty butt back onto my couch, uh uh. And don' even get me started on that toothless, greasified, good-for-nothing Kaufman boy she's been calling her boyfriend. That impregnatin' bastard don't got two licks worth of common sense. Hell, he couldn't hold a job pickin' lice outta his sister's hair, if that's what it came down to. And did you know he turn down that nice offer Millie gave him as custodial overseer for Ray's Drive-In 'cross town? Shit, that boy think he can keep my Ginny shackled up in his mamma's RV forever with no sort of income, he's got another thing comin', uh huh—Fifty-NINE!—Well, I jus' don't know what to do with all this, I sure don't. Jus' found out too on Tuesday, Ginny ain't even

allowed back in school the whole rest of her 10th year due to that ass-whoopin' she gave Tommy Lee's daughter last week. You know, I ain't discriminatin' for Ginny, but that one-armed bitch got what she deserved, mouthin' over Ginny's condition and all. She's just jealous 'cause she's the only virgin left in that whole year and it ain't 'cause no damn gospel preachin' neither—uh uh, honey. I don't think I gotta say it...but we all know even the saddest of them Kaufman boys wouldn't stoop to knockin' her crippled ass up—Six-TY! I guess all's I can say is, this just ain't been my proudest year as a mamma, but at least my little Billie's got potentiality. He's about the best harmonica player in the whole county and I bet he can lick anyone over in Striegler County too, given the right connections and all. I tell you, that boy's gonna make it big.



## For Granted

Jeanne Smith

The last few nights I've had the same dream that I'm wearing this horrible mask and can't remove it from my face. It's gold and angular. The nose points down, and the eyes are warped triangles. The funny thing is, in the dream, my kids can't tell I'm wearing the mask. I cry to them, "Help me get this thing off!" They just giggle and take no notice. I tug at the plaster and feel that if I continue, I'll tear the flesh off my face.

I work in this retail store downtown. We have all kinds of home décor and gardening items. The other day when I was on my smoke break, it was raining like hell, so I stood in the doorway of the receiving dock. I had one foot in the door and the other in the stock room. I heard a couple of the guys from shipping talking about ripping off some of the furniture and selling it. They also talked about stealing some of the expensive window treatments or wall pictures we have and returning them at the store across town for a store credit. I just stood there minding my own business, having my smoke.

After a while, one of them came up to me and asked me for a light. My mother always warned me that beginning conversations with lighting a person's cigarette is trouble. Of course, I lit his cigarette. The one thing I couldn't do was say "No."

We talked a bit, just chitchat. Then the other one walked up and asked me if I heard anything they were talking about. I told him I didn't. They said, "Good," and I finished my break.

The rest of the day I thought about what they said. I'm a single mother, and money is always really tight. It would be nice to have some extra money for the kids.

I unloaded this huge box of candles for the rest of the afternoon, pricing them and putting them on the shelf. \$4.99. \$4.99. \$4.99. \$4.99. \$4.99. \$4.99. Pricing is tedious work. \$4.99. \$4.99. \$4.99. I thought about how little I make at this job. \$4.99. \$4.99. \$4.99. Then I put one in my pocket. \$4.99. \$4.99. \$4.99. I couldn't believe I had done it. I had never stolen anything in my life before that. I said I wasn't going to do it ever again...after this time. I put another one in my pocket and continued pricing. \$4.99. \$4.99. \$4.99. Two candles on store credit. That would be over ten dollars.

After work, I ran across town to the other store. I forgot to take off my apron before I went into the store. When I noticed it, I was already in line to exchange the candles. The girl asked if I had my receipt. I told her no, they were a gift. She snorted. She was probably saying to herself that I was a real nightmare. Trash for trying to pull a scam like that. I got the credit and then I bought some packages of noodles and sauce for dinner. I felt strange serving stolen noodles to my girls. I keep thinking about karma. I read about it in the Time Life Mysteries series. In five years I'll probably be robbed of everything I own by some twenty-three-year old drifter with a guitar. I'll come home one day, and everything will be gone.

(Continued on the following 2 pages)



(Continued)

The noodles were terrible anyway. Tonight the phone rang. It was a wrong number, but the caller refused to hang up. Instead, she kept insisting that I knew her from Ivy Falls High School. I told her I never went to high school and to leave me alone. I hung up the phone.

Before I went to sleep, I put on this old pink dress of my mother's. The smell of moldy fabric and attics brought back memories. The last time I wore it I was seventeen, and I thought I was going to the prom with Billy Duncan. He told me he couldn't go with me the night before. It suited me just fine. I never was a dancer. I couldn't zip the dress up the back all the way. The arms were too tight at the forearm and too puffy at the bicep. The skirt length was just above the knee, and the whole thing shot out around me like an upside down funnel. I took off the dress and went to sleep. If someone said to make a wish, I would wish for a real night's sleep. I don't have dreams anymore. Only a few hours of choppy blackness. One of the girls always wakes up in the night with bad dreams or a stomachache or something. Jessie is ten and can't get through the night without some nightmare about her being kidnapped and nearly killed. I can't make her stop worrying. Sometimes I think they talk too much at school about the dangers of talking to strangers. This time last year, I was married...technically. Common law. Guess that's why he thought he could disappear like that without saying a word to anybody. I thought he'd leave all along, and then one day he did.

This morning the girls wanted pancakes with fruit. I poured each of them a bowl of cereal and some orange juice in these little glasses with bears on them that say, "Home is like a hug."

We ate together silently. I didn't eat much. The girls kicked the legs of the table and made their cereal slosh around in the bowls. I told them to quit it. Julie, my youngest, asked me if I liked her anymore. I told her I did.

"Well, you always seem so tired," she said.

My eldest slapped her across the back and told her to be quiet. We finished the meal.

After breakfast, I remembered that I'd forgotten to listen for the weather. I turned on the radio to an AM station. The girls groaned. On the radio, the announcer said there would be more rain today. I wasn't surprised.

Work was slow today. A typical Wednesday, I guess. On my break, one of those guys from shipping, Chris, offered to get me a sofa.

"No one will know," he said. I'm not so sure. I told him I'd think about it.

After work, I went to have a drink with him. We talked about work and our families. I didn't find him attractive in particular or interesting enough to think about later. Still, he was sort of nice. I looked at my watch. I told him I'd better be getting home. The girls must have been home alone for a few hours now, and they would be worried.

Chris walked me home. I told him I did want the sofa as long as he was sure it wouldn't be a problem.

"I'd like to see more of you," he said.

I told him I didn't think it would be a good idea. "I'm no fun," I said. "You'll see."

It had stopped raining, but the sky was still soaked with soggy clouds.



The front porch of my house was dark and cluttered with leaves, and the door handle had a mess of those ads that get attached with a rubber band. The windows were dark in the house, like nobody had been there all day. I told Chris I'd see him tomorrow and that he should go. He said he'd just wait to see that I got in okay. I dug in my purse for the key to the front door and then put it into the keyhole.

There were no lights on in the house. I called out to the girls, but there was no answer. I switched on the hall light and made my way through the house. Chris followed behind me. I went to each room and didn't find my girls. Chris asked if they could be at a neighbor's or something. I shouted at him that they were supposed to be home and made him leave. I sat down on the couch and put my face into my hands. I couldn't think of a single place to look for them. We didn't have any family near us. I phoned over to a friend of the girls', and they hadn't seen them since school. My mind got all jumbled up, like I was having a nightmare or something. It was nine-thirty.

I decided I should call the police. They sent someone over, but he was a major waste of my time. He must have asked me seventy-five questions. Did I have any enemies? Had the girls acted in a strange way recently? Were things okay between us? A bunch of silly questions, if you ask me...and half of 'em were downright insulting. The cop left, and I sat on the couch to have a smoke. A round ashtray fit on my left knee where I could balance it if I had my feet up on the coffee table. No telling how many I smoked. Each cigarette burned down to the filter nearly singeing my fingers. The girls hated my smoking. I quit for three days once, and the girls got really hopeful that it was for real. They made little cards for me that said, "Thank you for not smoking." The next day, Jessie broke her arm climbing a tree. I was a wreck. The fall knocked her unconscious, and I wasn't sure what would happen. I've smoked since then.

The doorbell rang. I opened my eyes and lifted my head. It was two in the morning. My neck ached from sleeping so long sitting up. The ashtray had spilled all over the carpet, and my fingers stung from a nasty scalded spot between my smoking fingers. I was groggy when I opened the door and saw Jessie sitting on the porch, shivering, with Julie, asleep, in her arms. I knelt down beside her and touched her face.

"I'm sorry," she said. "We were going to go away so you could be happy again."

I drew back my arms to my body and crossed them. I looked at the girls. Jessie looked at me, real sad like. That's when I slapped her hard across the face. I picked up Julie and led Jessie into the house. We didn't say anything to each other. She went to her room and shut the door. Through the walls I could hear her whimpering and mumbling to herself. I took Julie to her room and put her into her bed. Her eyes opened slightly for a second and then opened wide to look at me.

"Mommy!" she said happily.

I stood up and turned away from her. The door banged shut behind me. I didn't care if they woke up in the morning.

## Light Up Las Vegas

Jacklyn Bennett

There is something cruel about electricity. The initial shock? No. Though that seems to be the most crucial part. And it is not the seizure the body has afterwards. That is the real clincher. It is the memory loss that really gets to a person. The where did I park?'s and the how did I get here?'s. But truly, the image that disturbs me the most, is the one of a drugged patient lying on a medical table...tubed and wired...with a man at the head of the bed, leaning over you, conductors in hand. It is the image of such control, the idea, or mere picture of the frankensteinesque quality of the whole scene.

It is the kind of thing they do not do to animals...or that PETA does not want you to do.

Yet a consenting adult, one who has run out of options...oh sure...go ahead...shock the hell out of me. I dare you. If it works, (which I doubt it will, because nothing has and nothing continuously does) but if it works, then I owe you my first, second, and third born. But if it does not work, (which it probably will not) then do not expect me to stick around long enough to pop out even one kid.

But then there is the part of the brain that hopes, prays even, that something will go terribly wrong and you will never have to wake up again. Or you do wake up, and you are numb.

God, to be numb.

They say it would not be worth it. They say that without feelings, you would be nothing...well, I am nothing now. I am nothing, nobody, no how, no way. So just give me the chance to have something different. Something more than the nothing I have now, and maybe I will jump at it. Or maybe I will not. Or maybe I will even let you attach electrodes to my skull and light up Las Vegas.

Maybe.

Or maybe not.

All I am sure of is that I am lying here, watching as you shove an IV into my hand, and prep my temples with alcohol:

And that is enough for me to wish that electricity could be more powerful than science allows.

## Latitude

Jon Lee Hart

Somewhere down the line of meat lockers and trailer trash, you forgot who I am. You didn't want to see underneath, the cause and effect which had its affect on me and took its toll like the tired old man working Dallas North until 5 am. How I envy him at times, just seeing the passing by, the occasional motorist who makes the light go "ding" and the bell ring until someone else follows the path. The path I wish to travel is no longer a road, no longer a manmade construction set out for what was meant to be. I make my own road now, perpendicular to what was made. I remember the night I chased hell until the summer passed with an echoing halt, a foreshadowing of the coldest winter my body and soul has never felt. I forgot how much I hate to travel alone, but my car does go faster this way. Now one question remains - Do I travel alone and get home fast enough to watch the ten o'clock news, or do I stop, break the code and help the hitchhiker catch the nine?



Sherry Dickson



## **It's Your Fault I'm A Poet**

Shellie McCullough

I walk 6 miles every day  
Trying to forget how easily you  
walked away from me.

Why can't you be the cotton candy of my memory?  
Why must you be the chewy caramel,  
forever stuck in the teeth of my consciousness,

My tongue always roving,  
Attempting to dislodge a piece of time,  
A fragment of recollection.

Mr. Casual Degage, I hope  
You choke on a toothpick,  
Struggling with the visceral knowledge  
that only melancholy poets take long walks.



Sherry Dickson

## Focus

Dusty Bailey

I must concentrate  
Are my eyes dilated  
My vision is a blur  
So is my face

Focus  
I have no mirror  
I remember my face from

Focus

Nineteen no...  
Eighteen minus four

Five years ago

Plump  
I was...

I felt thin

My face was eleven years

Focus

Old

Will I know

I feel young

Am I old

Or caught up

Focus



Dusty Bailey with Kate Nigro







Dusty Bailey

## **Rememb-HER-ing**

Cameron Sells

i stumbled blindly in Darkness  
Until i glimpsed  
HER...

i stood t-HER-e staring  
Like a slack-jawed ox, oggling  
HER...

T-HE Rest of me tried  
To act casual, disint-HER-ested, but  
my eyes like iron filings w-HER drawn  
To HER lodestone...

On dusty moth wings i flut-HER  
Ov-HER to w-HER-e SHE b-HER-ns;  
A candle wreathed in dancing flames;  
Incindiery need propelling my combustion  
with  
HER...

HER-esies of unslept dreams  
As SHE ret-HER-ns to Paradisal  
Fields from w-HER-e SHE came...  
Will i ev-HER be the same???

## Who's Afraid of Virginia Ham?

Shellie McCullough

You tell me God's wrath will be immense  
And biblically proportioned into  
An obscene serving size of trichinosis  
If I partake in unclean food.

You slaughter the cloven hoofed beast of  
My integrity by insinuating  
The finite degrees of Earth's balance  
Are determined by my pork consumption.

Dead man walking down the sausage aisle  
Watched by the demons of red eye gravy,  
I carefully pick my last supper,  
Wearing my best smile of Judas,  
Wondering if Edward Albee liked ham.



Dusty Bailey

## The Emergency Room

Beth Turner Ayers

One drop on the floor;  
One drying drip  
From an unknown source,  
Narrowly missed  
By one footstep and more,  
Invisible to the passerby,  
Clear in my own vision,  
Tormenting me with its presence.  
It stopped and stayed there,  
On the polished, gleaming surface,  
Oblivion to others.  
But I must wait.  
And so I ponder  
On the cause of this distraction,  
This antagonist to quiet thought.  
From whom did this souvenir flow?  
And what became of them?  
My own disaster averted,  
I will leave this place soon.  
I will leave it all behind me,  
Except for the vision  
Of a single crimson dot.





## **Grandma Cope's Funeral**

R. Scott Yarbrough

Grandma would much rather have dropped  
dead of a simple life  
in the apple orchard between the two  
Appaloosa horses, or even been eaten  
by a Brown Bear while checking  
the water level in the cistern, but nature plays  
those tricks of asking what you want -  
then giving converse.

Cancer ultimately kills its host.  
It ridiculously feeds a selfish  
ego that supposes it might just cheat  
death to become the living body. It reads  
its maps and splits and blooms  
too quickly, too big, too pretty  
for a sordid adolescence it can't outlive. In reality,  
its death is just as untimely and tragic  
as the victim it slowly fills.

That's how we get to the Funeral.

It was a good, routine New  
Mexico foothills funeral: nasal singing,  
too small of church, and a good  
eulogy. Then the absurd set in as  
it always must. There's only so much  
we can plan: the opening  
of the casket at the end heebeegeebeed  
me; anything that makes a room-full  
of cowboys and war vets squirm  
is questionable. And to boot, since Grandma was dying  
of cancer, she was allowed the convenience  
of picking her own "I'm wearing  
it forever" dress. She had ultimately dressed  
herself for the funeral, gone down  
to JoNell's cosmetic, and then slid  
herself into the coffin for a nap. The mortician  
never should have closed  
the coffin while members of the family  
were still viewing. Her body  
was elevated to look 'natural'  
for viewing and thus  
she had to be shoved  
down by the shoulders

so that the lid of the coffin closed  
wouldn't bend just the tip of Grandma's nose for eternity;  
it's a mortician's measure of space. Then,  
they locked the coffin. Twice. I suppose  
they were afraid she might just slip  
out the bottom half and run  
crazily into the darkened woods forcing  
Persephone to restart the seasons  
and humanity to have to wipe  
all the calendars clean to start  
the Copian converts time table miracle.

"No resurrections please." Begin

the black car bright light parade to the burial.  
Grandmother "Darling" [The Daughter's wife's Mother]  
was late to the funeral. She missed  
the service and barely  
made the graveside. Through her handkerchief, she asked  
me to jump down to open the coffin. I told  
her it was locked - which was true.  
She made me swear "Ree" looked  
Pretty; I did, because she was. Back

at the church we ate covered dish: Fried Chicken  
with double batter, baked Yellow Squash dotted  
with black pepper corn and butter, Collard  
Greens with pepper hot vinegar,  
Coconut Pie just crisp with vanilla on the top, apple  
cobbler from Mama Ree's orchard of special Wine-Sap  
Sour Apples, Pot roast from the neighbor's slaughter  
of "Chalupa: the Cow," chicken enchiladas made  
from "Winston," the fighting cock, Mama Ree's favorite  
Rooster.

He was a pretty pitiful enchilada, but the Hatch Anaheim  
chilies  
made up for it and seconds and thirds and  
what would it have mattered in the scheme of things if I  
had opened it?



Sherry Dickson







Dusty Bailey



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